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ABSTRACT

Feedback was sought on the student teaching experience from student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. Findings indicated: (1) All parties agreed on the worth of the experience; (2) Student teachers disagreed with university supervisors on the worth of required seminars, format of lesson plans, and time allotted to student teaching and the concurrent completion of university courses; (3) Student teachers and cooperating teachers agreed that supervisors should supervise in their teaching specialization and should visit more often; (4) Cooperating teachers enjoyed the experience but felt it was insufficiently recognized or rewarded by the school district; (5) Cooperating teachers were most uncomfortable in their multiple role of guide and friend and also evaluator; (6) Cooperating teachers were most critical of student teachers in classroom management; and (7) Supervisors felt that seminars were necessary, student teachers should not be taking courses while engaged in student teaching, and were in favor of relevant inservice programs for cooperating teachers. (JD)

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Abstract

Title: Improving the Student Teaching Experience: A Cooperative Effort

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The student teaching experience is recognized by teacher educators as the ultimate challenge to the education major on his/her path to becoming a teacher. For it is here that the student progresses through the phases of role identification, role induction and role assumption. The student teaching experience, either positive or negative, heavily influences a student's decision as to whether to enter the teaching profession or not.

The purpose of this study was to seek feedback on the student teaching experience from student teachers at exit seminars; from cooperating teachers through questionnaires, interviews and seminars; and from university supervisors through interviews. The results of this feedback was analyzed and presented to all parties involved in the student teaching process in an effort to improve the program.

All parties were in agreement on the overall worth of the student teaching experience, on the university handbook used, and on the need for pre student teaching school observations.

Student teachers tended to disagree with the university supervisors on the worth of the required seminars, the format of lesson plans, the

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time alloted to student teaching and the concurrent completion of university courses. Student teachers tended to agree with cooperating teachers that university supervisors should supervize in their teaching specialization and should visit more often.

Cooperating teachers enjoyed the status of being selected as such, yet felt this was not recognized or rewarded by the school district. They were most uncomfortable in their dual role as guide and friend to the student teachers and at the same time evaluator of their performances. They were most critical of the student teachers in classroom management; and of the lack of communication between themselves and the university personnel.

A majority of the cooperating teachers expressed interest in attending inservice programs during school time on evaluation, communication skills and classroom management skills. Several cooperating teachers felt they needed more guidance from the university on being more effective in their roles. However it was apparent that much of the guidance that they sought was in the handbook which they had not read.

As a consequence of the feedback obtained, the existing student teaching experience has been enhanced with modifications.

TITLE: IMPROVING THE STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE: A COOPERATIVE EFFORT

The student teaching experience is recognized by teacher educators as the ultimate challenge to the education major on his/her path to becoming a teacher. For it is here that the student progresses through the phases of role identification, role induction and role assumption. The student teaching experience, either positive or negative, heavily influences a student's decision as to whether to enter the teaching profession or not. In an effort to improve the experience, feedback was sought from student teachers at exit seminars; from cooperating teachers through questionnaires, interviews and workshops; and from university supervisors through interviews.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Back in the 1860's, when student teaching began, it was felt that:

1. a student teacher should be given as much responsibility as would be expected of him when he became a regular teacher

2. observation by the student teacher should precede teaching

3. a cooperating teacher was necessary to

   a. supervise and direct,
   b. give illustrative lessons when necessary,
   c. discover the good traits of the student teacher,
   d. give the student teacher all possible encouragement,
   e. bring to the attention of the student teacher any faults so as to get the student teacher to become aware of them, and
   f. be as 'unobtrusive' as possible (Association for Student Teaching, 1959).

By 1887, student teaching became more generally accepted. Fifty-five institutions out of seventy-four Normal Schools in the United States provided some type of practice teaching program.

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In 1921, the National Association of Directors of Supervised Student Teaching met for the first time and formulated several purposes. One of these purposes related to cooperating teachers as follows:

> To work for appropriate recognition, professional status and salary for (cooperating) teachers with adequate professional preparation in teacher education. (Association for Student Teaching, 1959).

From the beginning of its formation, the Association attempted to ensure the involvement of the cooperating teacher. It was felt all along that the role of the cooperating teacher would continue to become more and more influential as teacher education programs incorporated more intensive experiences for student teachers.

Frank L. Steeves, in 1952, surveyed the literature concerning the cooperating teacher and found that the cooperating teacher was overlooked as a subject for objective research. He found that there were, for example, fewer than twelve articles dealing with the cooperating teacher in the Education Index, only two studies in the Research Bulletin, and not a single study concerned directly with preparation and role of the cooperating teacher (Association for Student Teaching, 1959).

The cooperating teacher was seen by Stratemeyer and Lindsey (1965) as a "teacher of teachers" who operated in a teacher education role. The main responsibility of the cooperating teacher was to prepare the student teaching environment so that maximum opportunity for learning existed.

Since 1955, the Harvard-Newton Summer Program has operated a laboratory school by Harvard's Master of Arts in Teaching Program and the Newton, Massachusetts, public school system (Mosher and Purpel, 1972). Master teachers, university faculty members, and student teachers joined in a study and in the instruction of elementary and high school students using a method called "clinical supervision." Since the program started, surveys taken have indicated that student teachers were not being competently supervised nor were their teaching experiences being carefully planned by the university supervisor or the cooperating teacher. Year after year, similar results were obtained;

until the university supervisors, in an effort to improve the practices, teamed up with the student teachers and planned, observed and analyzed what went on in the classroom.

Kraft and Casey (1967) stated that the cooperating teacher had difficulty in assuming his role because he was not fully aware of the situation. The already published information depicted the cooperating teacher as a person who sought to give the student teacher meaningful experiences. However, cooperating teachers frequently asked university supervisors to make recommendations regarding more specific types of experiences that student teachers might have in the cooperating public school. Consequently, more attention was given to the importance of the role of the cooperating teacher as more and more public schools served as laboratories for student teaching.

Woods, Mauries, and Dick (1973) depicted the cooperating teacher as one who (1) oriented the student teacher to the school environment; (2) helped the student teacher in his observation; (3) inducted the student teacher gradually into instructional and related duties; and (4) helped improve the student teacher through careful planning and evaluation.

Woods et al. listed the following factors as necessary for the cooperating teacher:

> ESTABLISH a good friendly relationship with the student teacher.
>
> UNDERSTAND the tension which the student teacher felt in a new situation.
>
> ACKNOWLEDGE the fact that the student teacher was still in college methods courses during student teaching experience and did not come fully prepared or totally unprepared.
>
> DISCOVER in conference the skills the student teacher had acquired before deciding upon class teaching responsibilities.
>
> INTRODUCE the student teacher to the class by referring to him as a helper or other teacher (to establish status).
>
> HELP the student teacher get well-acquainted with the class by getting him to help with individual students.

INTRODUCE the student teacher to all school personnel.

ACQUAINT the student teacher with the building, equipment, etc.

HELP the student teacher understand the community patterns, problems, etc.

PLAN for conferences with the student teacher to discuss strengths/weaknesses.

MAKE AVAILABLE to the student teacher the students' significant data.

SHOW confidence by giving assignments that encourage creativity.

ENTRUST the class to him more and more as he demonstrates the ability to "take over."

PREPARE the students in advance for the student teacher's arrival.

ALLOW the student teacher to deal with students to make plans in ways that are consistent with his own personality.

DEMONSTRATE to the student teacher that good planning promotes security.

Lipke (1979) undertook a study of student teaching to learn what other educators were doing to improve the experience for both student teachers and cooperating teachers. Lipke found that changes sought by her 200 respondents included: (1) better communication and role definition of the student teachers and cooperating teachers, and (2) training cooperating teachers to fit their roles. The results of the study prompted a model to be used in Brookline, Massachusetts, in efforts to reach the goals of the study.

Morris (1980), stated that "the preparation of supervising teachers had been carried on in a haphazard manner."

He identified sequential developmental stages through which teachers progressed in order to become competent cooperating teachers.

The five stages presented were:

STAGE 1: provided classroom teachers with an awareness that there was an opportunity to become cooperating teachers and a level of understanding sufficient for them

to decide if they were interesting in pursuing the opportunity.

STAGE 2: focused on the process of developing a knowledge base adequate for beginning cooperating teachers to be effective during the early part of the student teaching experience.

STAGE 3: the focus shifted from classroom teachers to cooperating teachers.

STAGE 4: supervisory skills were polished and honed to a fine edge so that the cooperating teachers could become highly skilled teachers of teachers.

STAGE 5: focused on developing cooperating teachers into agents of educational change.

Morris concluded that inservice improvement programs should be scheduled to assist each cooperating teacher to reach a stage of professional development, so that the quality of the student teaching expeience could be improved.

This conclusion was also reflected in another study, where Morris (1980) examined the priority concerns of directors of student teacher programs. Participants included 218 people who represented 48 of the 50 States and Canada. The priority of cooperating teachers: identifying, selecting, and providing professional development programs, ranked second out of twenty items considered. The priority of evaluating the performance of cooperating teachers ranked fifth on the same list of items.

Yoder and Arms (1981) found that few secondary teachers and only slightly more elementary teachers had had any guidance in providing the type of experiences student teachers really needed. It was the authors' opinions that cooperating teachers needed to know more about the objectives planned by the university program. They needed to get much assistance in integrating student teachers into the school environment.

Yoder and Arms conducted a workshop in which 60 cooperating teachers (selected by their principals) participated. These teachers indicated that they needed to have:

1. more brainstorming sessions;
2. a clearer understanding of the university's position on the development of lesson plans, and the college

supervisor's role in the total process;
3. more experience in working in conference;
4. more experience in writing evaluations;
5. a study of field experiences and of student personalities.

The authors concluded from their study that every classroom teacher needed inservice training to facilitate the student teaching process. Further, they concluded that "we should cease and desist" from the assumption that "good" teachers make "good" supervisors.

The cooperating teacher and the university supervisor have been concerned with helping student teachers gain the most from the student teaching experience. Gallemore (1981) examined perceptions of the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor about the primary focus for student teaching. The results from the study indicated that all parties in most instances were in agreement. Gallemore concluded that the quality of communication between cooperating school personnel and university supervisors was a necessary first step in designing meaningful relationships for the student teacher.

Researchers Wright, Silvern, and Burkhalter (1982) conducted a study involving thirty student teachers and their cooperating teachers to determine (1) how cooperating teachers communicate their expectations to student teachers, and (2) whether the cooperating teachers reinforced the methods judged desirable by teacher education. Surveys were administered to the student teachers and cooperating teachers separately. After the data were analyzed, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. On paper, cooperating teachers and university supervisors agreed on target activites.

2. Cooperating teachers tended to demonstrate rather than give instructions to student teachers.

3. Some student teachers performed activities; they recalled neither demonstration nor instructions given by their cooperating teachers.

The study further concluded that, if cooperating teachers saw themselves as role models, "demonstration may be a more salient mode than verbal instruction." For the student teacher who had for years experienced instruction primarily by lecture,

demonstration was an entirely new mode of learning.

The role of the cooperating teacher as listed in current student teaching handbooks basically emphasizes that the cooperating teacher needs to:

1. evaluate the student teacher
2. allow the student teacher room to "grow"
3. acquaint the student teacher with the school and school community
4. create a warm climate
5. help guide the student teacher, and
6. allow the student teacher to participate

METHODOLOGY:

Participants in this study were:

| | |
|---|---|
| Student Teachers: | 185 |
| Cooperating Teachers: | |
| in survey | 94 |
| in workshops and interviews | 20 |
| University Supervisors: | 16 |

Data were gathered as follows:

1. Student teachers completed an evaluation form at exit seminars ([Appendix I]
2. Cooperating teachers completed an evaluation form at exit seminars [Appendix II]
3. University supervisors were interviewed individually

Data from the above sources were analyzed and classified under the headings: strengths, weaknesses, recommendations.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### RESPONSES FROM COOPERATING TEACHERS:

The following is a summary of comments from cooperating teachers invited to participate in an end of semester workshop:

### STRENGTHS OF THE STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM:

1. Evaluation forms available in the student teaching manual.
2. Evaluation forms (weekly assessments) used by supervising teachers.
3. Number of visitations by the university supervisor.
4. Requirement of lesson plans.
5. Cooperation between principals and student teaching office in the placement of student teacher.

### WEAKNESSES OF THE STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM:

1. The principal should counsel the student teacher regarding building and district policies and the supervising teachers as to their roles and responsibilities.
2. Final evaluation form needs to be revised to eliminate the Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory, as well as leave more room for comments.
3. Field experiences are necessary before student teaching. (prior to junior year).
4. Definite need for more communication skills in secondary level; and classroom management training.
5. Manual guidelines for lesson plans are not followed by university supervisors.
6. Supervisor visits should not be announced at least fifty per cent of the time.
7. Seminars, especially in legal liability, are lacking.
8. Placement is important in matching the student teacher and supervising teacher because of content specialization.
9. Specialization of university supervisors necessary in particular subject areas.
10. Concern about insufficient time in the double assignments (six weeks per assignment in kindergarten and special education should be lengthened).
11. Academic preparation is not strong in some areas:
    - English proficiency among some elementary majors is poor.
    - Some teaching fields in secondary level do not provide competence in teaching skills. (Science is an example mentioned).
    - Science teachers have not been prepared in techniques.

- Physical education skills in specific individual and group sports are not broad enough.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. All candidates should be required to have several field experiences prior to their junior year. Specific weaknesses in academic preparation - English proficiency, competence in secondary level teaching skills, communication skills, classroom management techniques, science and physical education skills - must be remedied.

2. Student teacher and supervising teacher should be matched by content specialization. The university supervisor should also be specialized in specific subject areas.

3. Enforce standards on scheduling student teaching hours, especially for secondary level students who are required to spend four hours a day in school.

4. Develop an orientation program at the district and building level. The student teacher should also visit with the supervising teacher prior to the first day of student teaching.

5. Manual revision to specify lesson plan guidelines for all supervisors and student teachers; seminar requirements (example: legal liability, classroom management); revised final evaluation.

6. Since many student teachers prepare materials at their own expense, Teacher Center monies should be available to cover material cost for student teachers.

7. A system of recognition and reward should be developed for supervising teachers.

The following is a summary of student teacher comments made at Exit Seminars:

STRENGTHS OF THE STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM:

1. Much cooperation shown from everyone involved in the program: supervising teachers, administrators, university supervisors, student teaching office.
2. Practical experience.
3. Supervisors helpful, dependable and visited regularly.
4. Scheduling necessary classes while student teaching has been worked out to the advantage of the student teachers.
5. Employment seminar useful.
6. Handbook observation and evaluation forms helpful.

WEAKNESSES OF THE STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM:

1. Seminars are of little or no value.
2. Lesson plans are too lengthy; teachers and supervisors inconsistent in lesson plan requirements.
3. Criteria for grading at the end of the student handbook vague and long.
4. Course work in education classes should cover more of the practical aspects of teaching, with particular emphases on registers, cumulative cards/folders, etc.).
5. Student teaching is offered too late in the college career.
6. Time in the school is too long.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Make seminars more meaningful - cover topics or areas in small groups.
2. Locate seminars in school district areas rather than on campus.
3. Lesson plans should be the same format for all students and be based on not only what is taught in curriculum classes, but what is used in the schools.
4. Perhaps less emphasis on plans and more help with teaching ideas, bulletin boards, discipline, either in required notebooks or through seminars.
5. Supervisors should get together and standardize the lesson plan process and seminar suggestions.
6. Allow more flexibility with teaching schedule in calendar so teacher has more input.
7. Give more than six-hour credit for student teaching given.
8. Student teaching on a grading system instead of satisfactory/unsatisfactory.
9. Last week observations should be with other teachers or even at other schools.
10. Some sick days should be allowed.

11. University supervisors need to be specialized in a particular field; they should be more knowledgeable about public schools and curriculum
12. Give student teachers the opportunity to evaluate the cooperating teacher.
13. Cooperating teachers need to be more carefully screened.

The following is a summary of university supervisors' opinions of the student teaching experience:

University supervisors interviewed about the student teaching experience tended to disagree with the student teachers on the worth of the required seminars, and felt that the topics of these sessions were appropriate and necessary. They also felt, unlike the students, that lesson plans should be detailed, so that the student teacher had a clear plan of attack in his/her teaching. They believed that students should not be taking other university courses while student teaching so that their energy and time were not dissipated between the dual responsibilities. The need to work at the same time was frowned on, but recognized as an economic reality.

The university supervisors felt that the required school visits were adequate if a student teacher was doing well; extra visits were necessary for a student teacher who was floundering. They were in favor of relevant inservice programs, but were skeptical that teachers would attend. They felt that the University handbook was an excellent guide to the cooperating teachers - if it was read. They were in agreement with the cooperating teachers that pre-student teaching field experiences were a must, and that this was reflected in the success or failure of the student teachers.

In addition to the data obtained at the cooperating teachers' workshop, a group of experienced teachers were interviewed on their roles as cooperating teachers. They described themselves variously as:

1. Critical, yet fair; a guide;
2. A lead teacher who sets an example;
3. A guide, giving encouragement and supplying information;
4. A helper to help the student teacher obtain "classroom proficiency;"
5. An assistant to help the student become aware of teaching responsibilities and yet let the student teacher use his own ideas without having him imitate;
6. An observer.

They were most uncomfortable in their dual role as guide and friend to the student teachers and, at the same time, evaluator

of their performances. They enjoyed the status of being selected as a cooperating teacher, yet felt this was not recognized or rewarded by the school district. These same cooperating teachers felt that the university could be of more help to them by:

1. Preparing the students with "real world' ideas rather than just teaching only ideal situations. A suggestion was made that perhaps university professors should go back into the secondary level classroom to learn about the real world and to adjust their course curriculums to be more realistic.

2. More communication was expected from the university supervisor -- even phone communication would be preferred to none.

3. Student teachers' schedules should be set up where they would begin and end the school district semester. A suggestion was made that a few weeks be cut from the middle of the student teaching term so that the "hectic" beginning and ending days of a semester could be "lived" by the student teacher.

4. All cooperating teachers interviewed believed that student teachers were not prepared to teach some of the subjects they chose to teach and they were most critical of their classroom management.

5. It was more effective to have the university supervisors supervise in their own major field.

Positive outcomes of being a cooperating teacher included:

1. Being more alert as a teacher;
2. Learning new techniques from the student teacher;
3. Feeling self-satisfaction;
4. Trying harder to be well-informed in subject matter;
5. Becoming more enthusiastic;
6. Accepting new ideas;
7. Enjoying the student teacher who has not yet reached a "burned-out" state; and
8. Achieving a feeling of accomplishment.

Negative outcomes of being a cooperating teacher included:

1. Having a poor student teacher;
2. Working too hard for too little pay;
3. Filling out too many reports;
4. Evaluating the student teacher;
5. Losing the student teacher after twelve weeks when the students were removed from the student teacher-pupil relationship.

All the cooperating teachers interviewed felt that inservice programs during school time would definitely help them in their roles. The "inservice" they attended at the beginning of the school year they considered of little value, and merely an introduction into the student teaching program. Such topics as evaluation, communications skills and classroom management were suggested. All cooperating teachers interviewed felt they needed more guidance from the university on being more effective in their roles. However, it was apparent that much of the guidance that they sought was in the handbook which they had not read.

POSTSCRIPT:

As a consequence of the feedback received from all parties, the following changes were made to the student teaching program:

1. For the first time, two large school districts allocated time slots in their inservice program for cooperating teachers, student teachers, and university supervisors. A panel consisting of the Dean of the College of Education, two university supervisors, two cooperating teachers, and two student teachers from the previous semester discussed the student teaching experiences; a psychologist gave a presentation on "Communications Skills" to improve communications between the student teachers.
2. A concerted effort was made to have university supervisors in their own teaching area by assigning most of the supervising to full-time faculty instead of employing part-time faculty and full-time supervisors.
3. Efforts were made to beef up seminars with student suggestions for topics: legal issues, classroom management, job hunting, school district policies.
4. Teachers were made aware of the selection process for becoming a cooperating teacher and of the prestige in being selected to assume that role.
5. Cooperating teachers were honored at an afternoon tea prior to the new semester's inservice sessions.

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INTERN EVALUATION OF STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

This form is designed to provide data to evaluate the student teaching program rather than a particular individual. The anonymous response will be treated as group data. Please return the form in the enclosed enveloped.

Elementary _____

Secondary _____

All-Levels P.E. _____
All-Levels Music _____
All-Levels Art _____
All-Levels Speech and Hearing _____

The following items are to be rated on a 1-5 scale: 1-very poor; 2-poor; 3-average; 4-good; 5-very good. Please comment on items that you rate low.

1. Services of the student teaching office____
2. Description of student teacher's responsibilities ____
3. Description of cooperating teacher's responsibilities ____
4. Description of university supervisor's responsibilities ____
5. Student teaching placement ____
6. Rapport with cooperating teacher ____
7. Opportunity to try out professional skills ____
8. Number of visits by the university supervisor ____
9. Spacing of visits by university supervisor ____
10. Availability of supervisor when needed ____
11. Rapport with university supervisor ____
12. Contribution of supervisor's conferences to professional development ____
13. Contribution of seminars to professional development ____
14. Evaluation procedures ____
15. Overall program rating ____

COMMENTS: (Use other side if necessary.)

Appendix A

COOPERATING TEACHER EVALUATION OF STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

This form is designed to provide data to evaluate the student teaching program rather than a particular individual. The anonymous responses will be treated as group data. Please return the form in the enclosed envelope.

Elementary _____
Junior High or Middle School _____
Secondary _____

All-Levels P.E. _____
All-Levels Music _____
All-Levels Art _____
All-Levels Speech and Hearing _____

The following items are to be rated on a 1-5 scale: 1-very poor; 2-poor; 3-average; 4-good; 5-very good. Please comment on items that you rate low.

1. Communications from student teaching office _____
2. Access to program director _____
3. Description of cooperating teacher's role and responsibilities _____
4. Description of university supervisor's duties _____
5. Placement procedures _____
6. Type of student teaching experience _____
7. Length of student teaching experience _____
8. Procedures for removal or change of student teachers _____
9. Communications with university supervisor _____
10. Visitations by university supervisor _____
11. Inservice assistance to improve supervisory skills _____
12. Procedures to evaluate student teachers _____
13. Procedures for selection of cooperating teachers _____
14. Opportunity to participate in program policy making _____
15. Overall program rating _____

COMMENTS: (Use other side if necessary.)

Appendix B